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ABSTRACT

This three-part concept paper was the result of a colloquium, during which 35 community college educators met in Traverse City, Michigan, to discuss issues related to access, assessment, and developmental education and to develop concept papers and recommendations for each topic. First, introductory material describes the colloquium and its objectives, and attempts to provide an idea of the participants' emotional and deeply personal involvement in the issues and the event. After noting the interdependence of the concepts under consideration, the paper addresses the open door philosophy of the community college, arguing that without supportive programs to ensure students' success, the goal of educational equality is not achieved. Recommendations for action are presented next, focusing on community needs assessment; intervention strategies; inservice staff development; and research needs. The next sections deal with issues and challenges related to student assessment, proposing a philosophy and definition of testing and offering recommendations for the development of comprehensive and systematic assessment programs for all students. Finally, the paper considers the role of developmental education in the community colleges, redefining the concept, identifying specific characteristics of successful programs, listing advantages of effective programs, and offering recommendations with respect to program evaluation, student-teacher ratios, ongoing staff development, comprehensive student support services, teacher qualifications, learning modes, business-industry programs, college credit, and other areas. (EJV)

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A CONCEPT PAPER ON CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: ACCESS, ASSESSMENT, AND DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

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Foreward

In July, 1986, 35 community college educators met on the campus of Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City for a colloquium titled "Toward Leadership in Access, Assessment, and Developmental Education." Sponsors of the colloquium included the American College Testing Program, the National Council on Student Development, the National Council of Instructional Administrators, the American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges, the National Council on Black American Affairs, the National Council of Hispanic Americans, and the National Association of Developmental Educators.

The purpose of this colloquium was to discuss issues related to access, assessment, and developmental education with an outcome resulting in a paper addressing each issue. The charge of developing this paper was initially made by the Board of Directors of the American Association of Community Junior Colleges in 1985-86. The AACJC Board, under the direction of the President and Chief Executive Officer, Dale Parnell, believed that access, assessment, and developmental education are critical issues affecting the Association membership. The AACJC Councils that sponsored this colloquium were asked to lead the development of a position paper for presentation and review by the Board. This position paper represents the views of the colloquium participants and was written for broad distribution nationally and for presentation to the AACJC Board of Directors.

ACCESS, ASSESSMENT, AND DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

This great country is rich with opportunities for its citizens. Only in the United States can all persons, regardless of their background, pursue the dream of higher education. In its short history, the community college has opened its doors of opportunity to millions of people who have previously found the doors of selective universities closed.

On the surface, the open door community college that is intended to help fulfill dreams of United States citizens is exciting indeed! Unfortunately, a simple commitment to non-selective admissions in the community college has resulted in much criticism of the fulfillment of the community college mission. In fact, an outspoken critic of the community college asserts that students who attend these colleges receive a "second best" education (Zwerling, 1976). Zwerling suggests that the American community college is not a vehicle for opportunity but is a social filter and provides a "cooling out process" so that aspirations of students who want to be upwardly mobile are brought down to a "realistic level."

In July, 1986 a small group of community college professionals met to address several important issues that are basic to the heart of the community college mission. The participants heard outstanding speakers present challenges and criticisms of their work and they were forced to deal with some unpleasantries about the outcome of community college interventions. As practitioners, the participants had learned "first hand" that access through the open door community college without comprehensive assessment and developmental programming was counter-productive to the basic purpose of providing opportunity toward the achievement of student aspirations. Sometimes it is difficult to face the reality that community colleges are all not always successful in the completion of goals.

This 1986 Traverse City Statement which describes issues related to access, assessment, and developmental education is long overdue. As loving critics of the profession, the participants agreed unanimously that the open door community college must make good its promise of opportunity through a variety of pragmatic interventions discussed in this paper.

The sub-group that worked with the access issue spent countless hours, day and night, tackling the ramifications of the open door in the community college. These professionals concluded that simply opening the doors of a community college without being community-based and without providing specialized intervention support was not meeting the challenge of access. This issue was emotional indeed. Informal discussions led to a realization that some participants were unable to meet the selective criteria of universities and began their higher education at "second chance" community colleges.

The student assessment issue was equally emotional among the issues raised. If colleges assess basic skills prior to their enrollment, will this practice limit access to thousands of citizens? Assessment and course placement are extremely volatile issues in the community college today. If a student cannot pass a basic skills test, due either to cultural differences or test anxiety, should colleges restrict the courses in which that student may enroll?

Some participants shared their personal experiences with testing and strongly cautioned against testing as the only measure of student readiness. Thus, it was unanimously agreed that student assessment is more than testing of basic skills and should include an assessment of motivational levels, study skills, background, past performance, educational readiness, and self concept. In no way should an assessment program restrict access; rather, it should be utilized to promote the success of students toward the pursuit of educational goals.

What happens to a student who walks through that open door and participates in a pre-enrollment assessment program only to find that he or she needs specialized intervention to be successful in college work? A true commitment to access requires an incredibly strong and effective developmental education program. The developmental education sub-group discussed much of the literature in the field and concluded that successful developmental education programs enhance academic standards, improve student retention and goal achievement, and provide important benefits for society as a whole.

Community college professionals are working in settings that are probably the most challenging in the American educational system. A classroom with students from various ethnic backgrounds, ages, and academic levels, is extremely challenging to address successfully. Many students who see community colleges as their last chance for opportunity desperately need professional interventions through developmental assessments and support programs. Without these interventions, community colleges often make a mockery of the open door concept.

It may be important to note that the Traverse City participants believed that their position was a major departure from prevailing concepts and definitions. Previously, access was defined as simply opening the door. Student assessment was too frequently used only as a pre-enrollment testing program, and developmental education was only remedial courses designed to deal with the underprepared in basic skills. As one reads the 1986 Traverse City Statement, it is important to note that the participants departed from the above definition of these three concepts. This departure presents major challenges requiring the attention of professionals at both the local and national level. These challenges, in the form of recommendations, are offered with the intent that they will be appropriate in all types of community colleges, large and small, rural and urban, statewide and locally governed.

Organizations and individuals resist change. Successful implementation of the three concepts presented in this paper will require change on behalf of many professionals. In the sixties the community college was the rebel promoting change in the American higher education system. The time has come for community college educators to revitalize the spirit of promoting change, to critically assess policies and practices,

and to enthusiastically tackle the challenges addressed in this paper. It is the hope of the participants that the emotion and energy generated during one short week in Traverse City, Michigan by a small number of concerned community college professionals will be shared locally and nationally as the profession addresses the important challenges associated with access, assessment, and developmental education.

Reference

Zwerling, L. S. (1976). The crisis of the community college: Second best. McGraw Hill.

Proposal
American Association of Community and Junior Colleges-Policy Brief
ACCESS, ASSESSMENT, AND DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION*

INTERDEPENDENT CONCEPTS

Access, assessment, and developmental education are interdependent concepts. Simply opening the door of higher education to a diverse citizenry, without prescriptive assessment and comprehensive developmental support programs, is as irrational as registering the entire populace for a swim meet without first assessing individual swimming abilities. Some may be ready to compete while others will need specialized remediation to perform successfully.

In its short history the American community college has opened its doors of opportunity to millions of people who have previously found the doors of selective universities closed. Unfortunately, a simple commitment to the access through non-selective admissions has not been enough to ensure student success. Students who are not prepared to succeed have found the community college to be a revolving door. Assessment of entry level skills and abilities is imperative to ensuring student success. Students with identified deficiencies should have the opportunity to benefit from a comprehensive program of developmental studies.

ACCESS: MAKING GOOD THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OPEN DOOR

Over the years, society's moral commitment to providing access to higher education for all citizens was believed to be fulfilled through community colleges with non-selective admissions policies. Citizens who were unable to attend four year colleges due to academic unpreparedness, financial limitations, or geographic location now have the opportunity to pursue the American dream. Persons who want to learn a new skill for reentering the job market have a college within commuting distance of their home to achieve this goal. On the surface, it appears as though the country's moral and legal obligation to provide equality of educational opportunity for all have been met through the community college.

Unfortunately, too frequently this open door became a revolving door for many community college students. While students could enroll in community college programs with ease, too often they did not meet with academic success and thus did not achieve their educational aspirations. A common criticism of the comprehensive community college is that it has failed to meet its primary objectives of providing equal opportunity and quality education even though all of the citizenry may easily enroll in its programs.

This limited view of access as an open door admissions policy, without supportive programs to ensure students' success does not fulfill the intent of providing educational equality. True fulfillment of access of American higher education requires attitudes and behaviors

*Note: An expanded version of this paper is in press as a chapter in a publication sponsored by ACT.

supportive of a broader concept of access. These attitudes should be reflected in college policies, practices, and programs that are intentionally designed to ensure student success from the point of entry, through the pursuit of their educational goals, and toward the fulfillment of successful exit goals.

Thus, a new definition of access that focuses on the institution's responsibility to assist the students in succeeding once they have entered the open door is needed. How well a community college succeeds with ensuring access should be measured by the number of students who achieve their educational goals, rather than the number of students who enter the institution.

Access: Recommendations for Action

Community colleges should: 1) Identify community needs and establish or redefine the community college mission and goals to meet those needs. Institutional practices should be consistent with the stated college mission; 2) Establish and support intervention strategies, such as assessment and developmental education, in light of identified student and community needs; 3) Establish and promote in-service programs that prepare staff to understand the diverse needs of students served by the college and to effectively support and deliver intervention strategies that ensure successful student access and matriculation; 4) Engage in broad base dialog on issues related to access and the development of strategies to promote access; and 5) Engage in institutional research to study community characteristics, and student demographics, and student matriculation in efforts to measure whether initial access to the institution is effective.

While these suggestions offered are appropriate for all community colleges, it is important to note that each individual institution should conduct its own assessment, develop tailored plans to achieve access related goals, and ensure that an evaluation of these efforts leads to program improvement. In addition, it is imperative that all persons associated with the community college work collaboratively toward the achievement of access goals. A committed college staff without a committed board of trustees and state legislature will not likely be fully harmonious toward the achievement of worthy goals.

It is important to note that comprehensive assessment is vital to the fulfillment of student success, and developmental intervention is often an extension of the assessment process. Thus, a surface commitment to access without a pragmatic commitment to programs of assessment and developmental education is no real commitment at all.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT: CRITICAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

A Philosophy and Definition

The open door community, technical and junior college has attracted a highly diverse student population. The varied skill levels of this population, coupled with the high rate of documented adult illiteracy in the United States, indicates that appropriate of students' skills and careful placement in a responsive educational program are needed if community colleges are to increase the probability of student success. Comprehensive

assessment is critical to the fulfillment of access objectives and to ensuring that this open door is not a revolving door for many students.

Community colleges which allow or advise academically underprepared students to enter classes for which they are not prepared may be closing the door to student success and blocking the road to achievement of both institutional and student educational goals. Assessment is a vital component for effective teaching and learning. An effective assessment program will promote educational quality, access, and the efficient use of institutional resources.

Student assessment is a systematic process by which students' abilities and interests are determined. Effective student assessment occurs throughout the educational process. While assessment is most commonly used as a pre-enrollment test of abilities in such areas as math, reading, and writing effective and comprehensive assessment programs are much broader in scope. In addition to basic skills assessments, effective assessment programs should include past performance, educational readiness (mental, physical, and emotional), educational goals, study skills, self-concepts, and motivation. Assessment is not just testing, but consists of a combination of systematic efforts and educational tools to guide the learning and teaching processes.

Assessment: Recommendations

1) All community, technical, and junior colleges should provide a comprehensive and systematic assessment program for all students. It is essential that all credit and credit seeking students be assessed in appropriate areas utilizing effective measures and tools. Non-credit students may be exempt from certain tests or other assessment processes designed for credit seeking students; however, certain aspects of assessment are appropriate and necessary for these students as well. This assessment program should include but not necessarily limited to academic development in basic skills, self-concepts, study skills, motivation, educational readiness, educational goals, and past achievement.

2) The assessment program should be a systematic, on-going process that begins on or before the time of enrollment and continues throughout enrollment with the conclusion of outcome assessments.

3) Prior to initial enrollment, students should have the opportunity to meet with a trained professional to integrate assessment information and to develop the student's educational plan.

4) The assessment process should be used to ensure proper placement of students in courses or programs to maximize opportunities for students to attain their educational goals.

5) Continuous staff development at both the local and state levels to improve expertise of staff and the quality of the total assessment program is essential.

6) Research activities should be expanded to include the collection and dissemination of assessment information. This should include but not limited to the establishment of normed data bases, appropriate data analysis, evaluation criteria, evaluation of student outcomes, and the validation of course placement.

7) During the assessment processes it is important that the procedures and needs of special populations be considered. When necessary alternative procedures should be developed to remove test biases that may disadvantage particular groups such as women and minorities.

8) A commitment should be made to the funding of necessary staff, facilities, equipment, and administration of the assessment program. Effective assessment programs that do not limit access should be funded at a sufficient level to make these services available for all students at either a no fee or a nominal fee basis.

9) Information about the college's assessment program should be disseminated throughout the college and the community and efforts to ensure that the service area is aware of the availabilities of various assessment procedures.

10) Assessment should be recognized as more than testing. While testing may be a critical component in the assessment process, other procedures such as counseling and the studying of past performance are valid assessment practices.

Summary Comments

The diverse students who have access to the open door community college deserve a comprehensive assessment program that includes testing, counseling and advising, guidance with course placement, and the development of educational goals. As state and local policymakers study the issues related to assessment and formulate recommendations, policies, and laws it is critical that they understand fully the concepts and practices associated with effective, systematic assessment programs. Simply mandating testing without assessment activities is not comprehensive assessment and this practice may actually restrict access and be counter productive to the community college open door philosophy.

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

Developmental Education Redefined

The term "developmental education" is used in post secondary institutions to describe programs that teach underprepared students effective cognitive and processing skills necessary to become more successful learners. The target for developmental programs are usually students who desire to enter transfer programs and career or occupational programs, or to be functional on the job and in day to day life in a rapidly changing society.

"Single shot" remedial courses for underprepared students are not as effective as total support programs which include advising and

counseling in on-going intervention. Hence, the term developmental education which includes, but is not limited to, remedial courses has evolved as an effort to describe a comprehensive and integrated program of ensuring individual academic success. Developmental programs are comprehensive in that they assess and address the effective and cognitive variables necessary at each level of the learning continuum, utilizing a combination of delivery systems such as basic skills courses, learning assistance centers, supplemental instruction, paired courses, and counseling services. Specific characteristics of successful developmental programs are that they: 1) Enable students to acquire competencies which match the entrance expectancies of faculty who teach college level career and transfer courses; 2) provide structured courses with clear expectations of homework, class attendance, and performance levels; 3) operate in colleges which have established policies and procedures that support the commitment of the institution to students learning; 4) ensure that governing boards and CEO's of the institution demonstrate their willingness to make tough decisions including setting high expectations for faculty, staff and students; 5) provide counseling and tutorial support needed to help students to meet their learning goals; 6) limit the faculty and staff assigned to developmental education to those that believe that students can and want to learn and are confident in their ability to cause learning to occur; 7) provide faculty and staff development programs; and 8) engage in data collection, student follow-up, and evaluation to determine the outcomes of their efforts.

Advantages

Effective developmental education programs are cost effective in light of enhanced fulfillment of the college mission and achievement of student aspirations. Cost effectiveness may be illustrated as follows:

1) Maintenance of academic standards - Successful developmental programs help to raise academic standards. Such programs enhance students' skills so that they meet higher academic standards than they would otherwise.

2) Improved retention - Studies report that students who participate in developmental programs are typically retained at higher levels than students who do not.

3) Societal benefits - In addition to providing associate degrees and certificates, community junior and technical also have a major role in training or retraining adults in American society. Sometimes training is required in basic skills to help individuals cope with the knowledge explosion inherent in the computerized high tech era.

Recommendations

It is believed that even if reforms currently being undertaken in public elementary and secondary education are successful in improving the quality of high school graduates, developmental education will still be needed for adults in a changing society. In the next decade, increasing numbers of non-traditional students and those who graduate from high school prior to this reform movement will be entering colleges and universities in the next decade. In efforts to prepare for these persons, colleges should:

1) Provide an annual review of developmental education programs to ensure that students acquire exit level competencies which match the entrance expectations of college level courses;

2) Recognize that diverse student populations have special needs in that intensive teacher-student interaction is required through the endorsement of low student-teacher ratios;

3) Provide an effective on-going staff development and training program for all faculty and administrators;

4) Provide comprehensive advising, assessment, course placement, and student support;

5) Provide faculty trained in developmental education at a minimum of the masters degree level and supported by trained para-professionals;

6) Provide multiple learning modes in order to meet the diverse learning styles and situations of individual students.

7) Provide funding levels for developmental education programs at a level at least as great as for traditional programs and ideally at a level reflecting the more intensive resources required.

8) Work with business and industry to promote on-going and, if necessary, on-site developmental education programs designed to meet specific industry needs.

9) Endorse the need for developmental education programs through the local governing board and college chief executive officer.

10) Identify developmental education as an essential component of the institution's mission.

11) Transcript developmental education credit equal to that of other college credit but not credit meeting graduation requirements.

An "open door" community college that does not have comprehensive, on-going assessment and developmental education support is grossly negligent in fulfilling its stated mission. Developmental programs should be designed to take students from where they are in their learning and move them to a higher level of knowledge and understanding. If community colleges are to continue professing the "open door" to opportunity, intentional efforts must be made to increase the effectiveness of developmental education.

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